



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**The Inspector General**  
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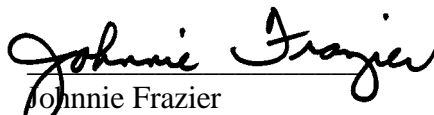
### **WORKPLACE VIOLENCE**

It is the Office of Inspector General's policy to promote a safe environment for its employees consistent with the Department's "Policy and Agency Position on Violence in the Workplace" (attached). This Office is committed to working with its employees to maintain a work environment free from violence, threats of violence, harassment, intimidation, and other disruptive behavior. While this kind of conduct may not appear to be a problem within the Department or our office, no place is immune. Any office could potentially be affected by disruptive behavior at one time or another.

Violent acts in our workplace will not be tolerated; that is, all reports of incidents will be taken seriously and will be dealt with appropriately. Such behavior can include oral or written statements, gestures, or expressions that communicate a direct or indirect threat of physical harm. Individuals who commit such acts may be removed from the premises and may be subject to disciplinary action, criminal penalties, or both.

We need your cooperation to implement this policy effectively and maintain a safe working environment. Do not ignore violent, threatening, harassing, intimidating, or other disruptive behavior. If you observe or experience such behavior by anyone on Department premises, regardless of whether he or she is an OIG employee, report it immediately to a supervisor or manager. Supervisors and managers who receive such reports should seek advice from the Human Resources Management Division (202) 482-4948 regarding investigating the incident and initiating appropriate action. **[PLEASE NOTE: Threats or assaults that require immediate attention should be directed to the appropriate security office at your particular location. You should keep that phone number handy. For example in the HCHB dial HELP for assistance.]**

I will support all efforts to discourage and reduce the probability of violent, threatening, harassing, intimidating or other disruptive behavior in our workplace and will monitor whether this policy is being implemented effectively. For additional information on understanding and dealing with workplace violence, refer to the OPM website on [www.opm.gov/workplac/handbook/toc.htm](http://www.opm.gov/workplac/handbook/toc.htm).

  
Johnnie Frazier  
Acting Inspector General

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
POLICY AND  
AGENCY POSITION  
ON  
VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

PURPOSE

Federal agencies are obligated to maintain a safe and secure working environment for their employees and visitors. To fulfill its responsibility in that regard, the Department of Commerce is proactively addressing the subject of violence in the workplace. To satisfy our obligations we have developed a Departmental policy for employees which addresses violent incidents that could occur at our facilities. It also provides the implementing measures whereby we can reduce the occurrence of violence through employee awareness, prevention and training.

POLICY

The Department of Commerce is committed to providing each employee and visitor a workplace environment that is safe and secure, and free of harassment, threats, intimidation, and violence. Violent or threatening behavior in the Federal workplace is prohibited. Such conduct at the Department of Commerce will not be tolerated.

BACKGROUND

Increasingly, violence in the workplace is recognized as a problem that employers must deal with. Workplace violence is an issue that has come to the forefront of public attention in the past several years due to several prominent media cases, as well as the rise in overall frequency of incidents. Recent data indicates that approximately 30 percent of the federal workforce has been subjected to some kind of violence associated with their work life. Even though the Department of Commerce may not appear to involve a high-risk environment, it is not immune to violence. Living and working in an urban setting can be extremely stressful for certain individuals. Some field assignments can be highly stressful for others. Commerce is abundantly active in both environments. Such stresses added to the pressures and vagaries of our respective jobs could be a catalyst for violent behavior.

We are responsible for developing measures for recognizing and addressing violence in our places of work. Ignoring such behavior only reinforces its existence and sends a message to the employee that it is acceptable.

Employees must be held accountable for unacceptable behavior. Addressing problems early or as they arise can prevent problem situations from escalating. Doing so will contribute to a safer environment for all concerned.

### DEFINITION

Violence in the workplace is that behavior which manifest itself through physical aggression directed toward others in the workplace by assault, by gesture, in writing, verbally, or any other form of expression that could be interpreted by a reasonable person as communicating a direct, or potential threat of harm to oneself or others.

### AUTHORITY and REVIEW

Federal Property Management Regulations FPMR 101-20.504-2, "Occupant Emergency Program," provides that occupant agencies are responsible for immediate, positive, and orderly action to safeguard life and property during a facility/occupant emergency.

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Standards of Ethical Conduct, promulgated most recently by the Office of Government Ethics in February 1993, ensures that the business of Federal agencies is conducted effectively and is an attempt to ensure that Government employees are persons of integrity who observe high standards of behavior.

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Sexual Harassment, 29 C.F.R., § 1604.11, "requires an employer to take immediate and appropriate corrective action when such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment for workers covered by § 703 of Title VII."

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Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) § 5(a), General Duty Clause of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, states "Each employer shall furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees..."

## RESPONSIBILITIES

Each employee is accountable for his/her own behavior and is expected to interact responsibly with fellow employees and supervisors. Employees are also responsible for informing supervisors of any acts of violence, threats or actions which could lead to violence in the workplace.

Supervisors and managers are responsible for enforcing this policy, to include taking administrative and/or disciplinary action against employees who violate the policy. Supervisors and managers should consult with the appropriate Human Resources Management office prior to taking action. Referral of employees affected by such behavior for appropriate counseling services through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) should be included in any initial actions by management.

Servicing Human Resources Management offices and Employee Relations Specialists are responsible for providing advisory services and assistance to managers, supervisors and employees regarding the EAP or administrative and disciplinary sanctions resulting from unacceptable behavior in the workplace.

The Departmental Office of Security (OSY) is responsible for technical advice and support regarding physical security matters, threat assessments, and to provide liaison with law enforcement agencies. If requested, OSY will provide assistance to any Departmental unit regarding such matters. The Herbert C. Hoover Building (HCHB) guard force and designated Security Specialists from OSY will provide immediate and direct response to emergencies occurring in that facility.

In emergency situations arising at the HCHB, you should call 482-HELP (482-4357) for an immediate response. If you are compelled to request assistance from 911, it is imperative that you also dial 482-HELP. Doing so will enable the HCHB guard force to coordinate with the responding local agency(ies) to assure that the response is to the correct location within the building.

## PREVENTION

The same actions that produce a safe, productive workplace and an atmosphere of teamwork also contribute to prevention of workplace violence. All Department employees should make good use of the resources available to them to encourage open communication, effective stress management, and constructive resolution of disputes. Examples include, but are not limited to, the Employee Assistance Program, Health Unit, and EEO Specialists. Employees experiencing high stress should discuss their concerns with their managers or with appropriate resource representatives.

Since supervisors have a special responsibility for maintaining the safety and well-being of their employees, they should exercise concerted effort to be well informed about applicable resources, and alert to situations in their work groups that might require their use.

#### RESPONSE

Threatening, harassing, or intimidating behavior should never be tolerated or ignored. Employees who observe or experience such behavior should report it immediately to their manager and, if appropriate, to the unit's Employee Relations component, security component, and/or the Federal Protective Service. Serious assaults or threats that require immediate attention should be reported to the unit security component, the Federal Protective Service, and/or the most readily available law enforcement authority, including local authorities.